United Nations A/C.3/56/SR.18

General Assembly
Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
21 December 2001
English
Original: Spanish

Third Committee

Summary record of the 18th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 22 October 2001, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Al-Hinai ..... (Oman)

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01-59452 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 115: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (A/56/203, A/56/222-S/2001/736, A/56/342-S/2001/852, A/56/453, A/56/488)

1. **Ms. Hammam** (Director of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict) read out the statement of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.

2. The annual report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on the protection of children affected by armed conflict (A/56/453) and the second report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/56/342-S/2001/852), submitted simultaneously to the Security Council and General Assembly in 2001, were complementary and should be considered together during the deliberations on that item.

3. In his report to the General Assembly the previous year, the Special Representative had indicated that his agenda for the second three-year mandate of his Office would focus on building a global social and political movement of awareness, pressure and protection for children affected by armed conflict and on consolidating the gains made during the first mandate. That vision had been translated into a work plan for the period 2001-2003.

4. In order to implement initiatives in the most effective manner, it was vital for the Office to have adequate resources and staffing. Additional staff was essential; accordingly, several new posts had just been filled and others would be filled soon.

5. Since the beginning of the Special Representative's mandate, his Office had identified the need both to fill critical knowledge gaps concerning the nature and scope of the impact of armed conflict on children and for better coordination and dissemination of available knowledge on the issue. It was determined that knowledge gaps needed to be filled in four areas: current trends in warfare affecting children; reliable data on children affected by armed conflict; relevant cultural norms and values for the protection of children and women during armed conflicts; and impact assessment of programmes and lessons learned. With the sponsorship of the Government of Italy, his Office, in collaboration with the Social Science Research Council, had convened a workshop in Florence in July 2001. The workshop, which had been attended by representatives of Governments and United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, foundations, research institutes and universities throughout the world, had accomplished its principal aims of developing an agenda and plan of action for research on the impact of armed conflict on children; mobilizing a research network that would deepen the connections across different institutions and constituencies; and ensuring that research outcomes and products were responsive to practical needs and could help to inform and strengthen policy-making and action.

6. His Office had proposed the formation of two informal inter-agency working groups intended to serve the cause of child protection within the United Nations system. The aim of the first one, which convened jointly by his Office and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the Department of Political Affairs, was to strengthen ongoing initiatives to incorporate child protection into the peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes. The aim of the other one, established together with DPKO, UNICEF and the Swedish non-governmental organization Rädda Barnen, was to produce a complete training package on the rights and protection of children for all multidimensional United Nations peace operations.

7. The Office and UNICEF had undertaken a review of the Child Protection Adviser experience in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The results of that review would serve as input for the informal inter-agency working group on the incorporation of child protection into the peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building processes; those results were already beginning to influence how his Office and UNICEF proposed candidates for recruitment as Child Protection Advisers.

8. As a follow-up to Security Council resolution 1341 (2001), he had visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo from 24 May to 3 June 2001 to assess first-hand the situation of children resulting from the ongoing conflict in that country. At the conclusion of his visit, during which he had met, inter alia, with war-affected children, political and military authorities, local non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies, the Special Representative had called

for a plan of action to end the recruitment of child soldiers, which had been accepted by the parties to the conflict. He had recommended placing child protection and rehabilitation on the peace agenda; expanding the presence of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and its humanitarian activities; providing adequate and sustained resources for child protection; improving the monitoring of commitments made by parties to the conflict; fostering a subregional approach to child protection; improving data collection and research; focusing attention on the special needs of girls; building local capacity for child protection and advocacy; reinforcing traditional values that protected children; and taking measures to end the plunder of natural resources.

9. Throughout the year the Office had worked closely with Member States, the Preparatory Committee, UNICEF and non-governmental organizations to draw up the agenda on children and armed conflict to be submitted to the General Assembly special session on children. It had also contributed substantially to the report of the Secretary-General entitled, "We the Children: End-decade review of the follow-up to the World Summit for Children", which, together with the agenda for action to protect war-affected children, had served as a basis for consultations among delegations working to conclude the outcome document.

10. The Office had made a number of proposals and convened discussion groups concerning the establishment and functioning of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, specifically relating to the involvement of children in the Court's proceedings as victims, witnesses or perpetrators of grave abuses during the war in that country. After much debate about whether and to what extent children might be held accountable, the principles of juvenile justice, with stipulated safeguards, had been incorporated into the Statute of the Special Court. The Office had also hosted two meetings with key actors to discuss how the Special Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission might operate to protect the interests of children in a complementary and mutually supportive manner, consistent with their distinct but related functions.

11. The Security Council had shown its concern for the plight of children affected by armed conflict through seven resolutions, several statements by its President, as well as open debates. Several regional organizations and key country groupings, in particular the European Union, the European Commission, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the G-8, had continued to promote the children and armed conflict agenda. It was however regrettable that the document on the protection of the rights of children, particularly of children affected by armed conflict submitted to the OSCE Ministerial Council in November 2000 in Vienna had not been adopted. The Office would continue to work with concerned partners with a view to overcoming the current difficulties in approving that document.

12. The Office and UNICEF had embarked on a campaign intended to help bring the Optional Protocol into force with the requisite 10 ratifications as rapidly as possible; to date there were 83 signatories and 6 ratifications. Efforts also continued to reach out to civil society, religious communities, women's and non-governmental organizations and opinion makers at the local, national and international levels. Many of the activities undertaken had been aimed at encouraging young people and youth organizations to participate in events co-hosted with UNICEF and non-governmental organizations during the meetings of the Preparatory Committee for the special session on children and the preparatory process for the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. In addition, the Voice of Children initiative had been further developed in Sierra Leone, and that programme would also be launched in other countries.

13. UNICEF and the Office had undertaken a number of joint initiatives, including an appeal to Heads of State and Government urging signature and ratification of the Optional Protocol, follow-up activities on the commitments made by parties to armed conflict and the planning of measures for collaboration on the implementation of the Cotonou African, Caribbean and Pacific States-European Union Partnership Agreement; UNICEF was also a key partner in discussions about and development of the research agenda and network proposed by the Office.

14. In the future, efforts to meet the challenges posed by the many conflicts around the world must be reinforced. The tragic events of 11 September had once again underscored the complexity of those conflicts, their destabilizing regional and worldwide

repercussions and the devastating physical and psychological effects which they had on children and adolescents. The international community must redouble its efforts to protect children and adolescents during all phases of conflict. In particular, better ways must be found to prevent the perversion of traditional or religious norms and values and the recruitment of children for use in conflict and to promote their rehabilitation and reintegration into peaceful societies. The adoption of the Optional Protocol was an important first step to that end, and States which had not yet done so should ratify it before the special session on children in order to ensure that the conditions for its entry into force were met. However, ratification was not enough; experience had shown that, despite efforts by some parties to armed conflict to adhere to commitments and international legal obligations, children continued to be targeted in many ongoing conflicts. There was thus an urgent need to further expand and strengthen mechanisms to impartially and credibly report on compliance by parties to armed conflict with all international norms, standards and commitments protecting children and adolescents. Such reporting was necessary to exert political pressure on parties that did not comply.

15. Short and long-term initiatives to protect children and adolescents were also needed, including demobilization of child soldiers and their rehabilitation and reintegration during and after conflict. Member States and all relevant actors must provide adequate and sustained resources for programmes in that area so that children and adolescents could channel their energies towards the promotion of reconciliation and sustainable peace in war-torn societies. The Office would continue to act as advocate, catalyst and facilitator for the important work of supporting the agenda on children and armed conflict at the political, policy and programme levels.

16. **Mr. Roberfroid** (Deputy Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund), speaking on behalf of the Executive Director of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), said that, although the special session on children had had to be postponed owing to the tragic events of 11 September 2001, the tireless efforts of Governments and groups of non-governmental organizations to prepare for that session must not be in vain. In fact, the new circumstances emphasized the urgency of building a better and more humane world.

17. More than 80 per cent of the text of the document on "A world fit for children" had been agreed, and agreement on the remaining issues was within reach. The views expressed by Governments during the preparatory process had served as a basis for the Fund's Medium-Term Strategic Plan for the period 2002-2005, which would be presented to the Executive Board in December 2001. The Plan reinforced results-based management and a human rights-based approach to programming. It reiterated the importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all the Fund's work and established five organizational priorities: girls' education, integrated early childhood development, new and improved immunization, fighting HIV/AIDS, and improved protection of children from violence, exploitation, abuse and discrimination.

18. The human rights approach was essential to the work of UNICEF. The Fund's commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child meant that children were entitled to rights as human beings as well as to the right to special protection as children. The Fund and its partners sought to make all their programming efforts reflect the Convention in order to translate it from a piece of paper into an instrument which really improved children's lives.

19. The Committee on the Rights of the Child continued to play a crucial role in promoting changes in law, policy and practice in order to protect the rights of children. However, because of the Convention's success, the Committee had an ever-increasing workload and needed more expert members. For that reason, UNICEF called once again on States to accept the proposed amendment to article 43 of the Convention, which would raise the number of Committee members from 10 to 18. To date, 105 States had accepted that amendment and 21 more acceptances were needed; he hoped that would be achieved by the end of the year.

20. The Fund strongly supported the adoption of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. He was pleased to announce that the tenth ratification of the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had been submitted very recently by Romania. The Protocol would therefore enter into force early in 2002, signalling the commitment of the international community to fight repeated violations of children's rights. The Optional Protocol on the involvement of

children in armed conflict so far had 85 signatures and six ratifications, while a number of ratification processes were under way. Once again UNICEF called upon all States to ratify both Optional Protocols and to make a binding declaration setting 18 as the minimum age for voluntary recruitment into armed forces, thereby confirming their commitment to put an end to the victimization of children.

21. The Fund was working closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the daily work of advocating the protection of children in conflict situations, in the preparation of the reports of the Secretary-General to the Security Council and the General Assembly on children in armed conflict, and on many other initiatives. It was present on the ground before, during and after conflicts to assist and protect children trapped in the chaos of war. Currently, in Afghanistan, UNICEF was engaged in a major effort to provide critical life-saving services such as food, water, sanitation, health care, warm clothes and basic education. It was sending humanitarian aid into Afghanistan using aircraft, trucks and donkeys for distribution by its national staff and non-governmental organizations which were its partners on the ground.

22. Over the past 12 months, UNICEF and its partners had made significant progress in advocating the release of child combatants and setting up programmes to demobilize and reintegrate them. In February 2001, 3,500 children had been released by armed groups in the Sudan and their reunification with their families had recently been completed. In Sierra Leone, UNICEF supported programmes for care and psychosocial support to children, and promoted the demobilization of child soldiers. Its activities had benefited more than 5,000 children associated with the fighting forces and an additional 5,000 abductees and other vulnerable children. A focus on girls was needed to address their special needs in the demobilization process.

23. The Fund had also begun to work with Governments and civil society in a number of countries to raise awareness of the humanitarian impact of small arms and light weapons, particularly on children. In its activities relating to children affected by armed conflict, the Fund continued to be guided by the report of Graça Machel and he was pleased to announce that her report on the progress made since her 1996 report would be launched in November 2001.

24. Children were the first victims of poverty but, if the international community invested in their future, they also held the key to its eradication. During the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, UNICEF had urged Governments to devote more resources to basic social services for children, such as health and education. Poverty would not be eradicated unless adequate resources were made available to build sustainable social programmes. At the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, UNICEF, in close partnership with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, had focused on education as a key preventive strategy in combating racism, stigmatization and marginalization. The Fund continued to advocate improved access to quality education, especially for girls.

25. The special session on HIV/AIDS had provided an opportunity to focus on the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on children, with nearly half of all new infections occurring in youth under the age of 18 and some 10 million young people currently living with HIV in the developing countries. UNICEF was working tirelessly with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the World Health Organization (WHO) and others to improve community support and make prevention the highest priority of the global response, with particular emphasis on the role of young people themselves.

26. Together with the Government of Japan and non-governmental organizations which were its partners, UNICEF was preparing for the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, to be held at Yokohama, Japan, in December 2001. That should be a landmark meeting which would focus increased international attention on the commercial sexual exploitation of children and lead to enhanced political commitment against that appalling abuse of the rights of the child. In the months ahead, the international community must renew its commitment to achieving a child-friendly world. The Global Movement for Children would continue to be a driving force, calling on everyone, everywhere, to work for the benefit of children. He called on everyone to work together to ensure that the postponement of the special session on children would simply guarantee that it would be even better.

27. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director of the New York Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that, since the previous session of the General Assembly, both the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child had devoted great attention to preparing for their participation in the special session of the General Assembly on children. However, owing to the tragic events of 11 September in the United States of America, the special session had been postponed indefinitely.

28. As of 17 October 2001, 191 countries had acceded to or ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. On 25 May 2000, the General Assembly had adopted two new Optional Protocols to the Convention, which had been opened for signature on 5 June 2000. As of 17 October 2001, 85 States had signed, and 6 had ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict; 10 ratifications were necessary for that instrument to enter into force. The Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had been signed by 78 countries and had been ratified by a tenth country that week; it would therefore enter into force in January 2002.

29. With regard to the amendment to article 43 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly in 1995, which would increase the number of members of the Committee from 10 to 18, he said that, as of 17 October 2001, 105 States parties had provided notification that they accepted that amendment, which, in order to enter into force, must be accepted by two thirds, or 127, of the States Parties to the Convention.

30. The Committee on the Rights of the Child would submit to the General Assembly at its session in 2002 its biennial report covering the six sessions held between January 2000 and January 2002. In 2001 the Committee had considered 27 reports of States parties: 21 initial reports and 6 second periodic reports. At its recently concluded twenty-eighth session the Committee had organized a one-day debate on violence against children in the family and in schools, following the previous year's debate on State violence against children. As follow-up to both discussions, and in accordance with the provisions of article 45 (c) of the Convention, the Committee had recommended, inter alia, the General Assembly should request the Secretary-General to undertake on its behalf an in-depth international study on the issue of violence against children. Furthermore, in January 2001 the Committee had adopted its first general comment which had constituted its main contribution to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and had also focused on the objectives in the area of education set out in article 29 (1) of the Convention.

31. During its autumn 2000 session, the Committee had adopted guidelines on the submission of reports of States parties relating to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict. It would in the near future adopt guidelines on the submission of reports of States parties relating to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

32. The rapid and virtually universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had generated an increasing amount of work for all partners involved in the implementation and monitoring process, including the Committee itself. The Committee had so far received 163 initial and 51 periodic States parties' reports. It had reviewed 168 reports and nearly 60 remained to be considered, resulting in a waiting list of approximately two years. The Committee had for some time been systematically searching for ways and means to decrease the backlog. In that regard, mention should be made of two recent measures adopted by the Committee: firstly, at its twenty-second session held in September and October 1999, the Committee had decided to consider nine reports instead of six at each of its sessions in order to reduce the existing backlog. That measure, which had been implemented over the past two years, had reduced the time lapse between the submission and consideration of reports to an average of one year. Secondly, in August 2001, the Chairman of the Committee had sent a letter to the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of all those States parties which had not communicated their acceptance of the amendment to article 43 (2) of the Convention to encourage them to do so, since enlarging the membership of the Committee would help it to deal with the heavy workload.

33. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continued to provide special support to activities related to the application of the Convention through the Plan of Action to strengthen the implementation of the Convention on

the Rights of the Child, in force since 1997, which was now part of the global programme to improve the servicing of the treaty monitoring system. In addition to providing substantive support to the Committee, activities carried out under the Plan of Action included helping States parties to fulfil their reporting obligations and following up the Committee's recommendations. During the period under review, the Committee had continued to increase its cooperation with agencies and organs of the United Nations and other competent bodies, including non-governmental organizations. It had held meetings with the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the Special Rapporteur on the right to food and the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing.

34. **Mr. Andrabi** (Pakistan) said that the enlistment and participation of children in military operations was a matter of universal concern since hundreds of child soldiers died or were wounded in hostilities. Children did not join up with combatants because they wanted to, but because they were forced to by poverty and economic privation. He asked the representative of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict whether her Office was considering the possibility of setting up a project to address the root causes of the mass recruitment of child soldiers and their participation in armed conflict. The Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF had referred to a Medium-Term Strategic Plan for the period 2002-2005 which was to be presented to the UNICEF Executive Board for approval and had mentioned that education for girls was one of its five organizational priorities. He wished to know whether the Plan for 2002-2005 would emphasize only education for girls, setting aside education for children as a whole, or would simply place special emphasis on education for girls while continuing the overall children's education programme.

35. **Mr. Zoumanigui** (Guinea) said that, two years previously, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict had mentioned an experimental project for children in Sierra Leone and had said that negotiations with donors to enable the programme to be started were well advanced. At the current meeting, the representative of the Special Representative had mentioned an initiative for children which had already been implemented in Sierra Leone and might also be applied in other countries. He wished to know what linkage there was between the new initiative and the experimental project and whether the experimental project had been implemented and, if not, why it had been decided to implement the initiative and not the project. If the initiative was to be applied in other countries, what were the prospects for its implementation?

36. UNICEF had already helped to demobilize some 7,000 child soldiers in Sierra Leone and to free thousands of child prisoners. He asked what coordination actually existed between the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, UNICEF, other United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations on the ground.

37. **Ms. Al Haj Ali** (Syrian Arab Republic) expressed regret that the report of the Secretary-General on the protection of children affected by armed conflict made no mention of the situation of children under the yoke of foreign occupation. Although everyone knew what was happening with those children, that was not enough to protect their rights.

38. **Ms. Stevens** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the European Union and the European Commission attached great importance to mainstreaming the rights of the child into all their activities, as the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights, which integrated children's rights into project financing, had demonstrated. She asked how the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights mainstreamed the rights of the child into its overall activities and, in that context, how it approached the issue of the child's right to participation.

39. The European Union welcomed the fact that child protection advisers had been included in peacemaking and peacekeeping operations, especially in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone, and would like to know what the lessons learned mentioned by the representative of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General had been and what cooperation existed between UNICEF and other United Nations bodies.

40. **Ms. Ahmed** (Sudan) said that, although it was difficult to make a meaningful contribution owing to the late receipt of the Secretary-General's report, she would like to point out that the report of the Special Representative referred to cooperation with non-governmental organizations and civil society in

activities designed to mitigate the harmful effects of armed conflict on children. She wished to know whether the Office of the Special Representative held consultations with non-governmental organizations from countries affected by conflict and sought a range of views on how to put an end to those harmful consequences. International non-governmental organizations did a magnificent job, but she would like to know what activities were being carried out with national non-governmental organizations on the ground. She would also appreciate further details of the work of the Office of the Special Representative in supporting peace initiatives and asked whether it took into account the presence of armed or rebel groups, which were responsible for many violations of the rights of the child in areas affected by armed conflict.

41. **Ms. Hagon** (Australia) drew attention to the important role that children and young people could play in dealing with all the issues that affected them. Under article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, children had the right to express their views, which should be taken into account in all matters affecting them. Consequently, she would like to know whether studies had been carried out into means of enhancing the participation of children from all social backgrounds and concerning initiatives designed to foster that participation.

42. **Ms. Barghouti** (Palestine) said that, despite the very late receipt of the Secretary-General's report on children and armed conflict, her delegation had been able to examine the report and had found that it contained no reference to children affected by armed occupation. She asked whether that had been an omission in the report and said that she would comment further on the issue in a later statement.

43. **Mr. Ferrer** (Cuba) expressed regret that neither the Executive Director of UNICEF nor, especially, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict had been able to attend the meeting. His delegation also regretted the late distribution of the Special Representative's report and the fact that, as in the past, the report mentioned the links between the Office of the Special Representative and its activities and the Security Council. He reiterated his delegation's position that the Charter of the United Nations established clearly the functions and powers of each organ of the United Nations, and its opposition to the growing involvement of the Security Council in activities relating to children. Since the issue was a social, humanitarian and human rights one, it belonged within the sphere of competence of the General Assembly, as the most democratic, participatory and representative organ of the United Nations, and that of the Economic and Social Council.

44. In that context, the most important thing was that the report dealt with children's involvement in armed conflict from the standpoint of its consequences, rather than its causes. His delegation believed that the fundamental approach must be a comprehensive analysis of the causes of conflict, since the consequences for health, education and production systems, among others, affected children in one way or another whether or not they participated directly in a conflict. He asked why the Office of the Special Representative did not put more emphasis on the question of conflict prevention and on studies of the causes of conflict and measures for tackling them.

45. **Ms. Hammam** (Director of the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict), replying to the question from the representative of Pakistan, said that it was necessary to address the underlying causes of the participation of children in armed conflict, rather than merely dealing with its consequences. There was agreement within the Office of the Special Representative on that point. As part of the Office's research agenda, concrete information on the situation of children would be compiled and the reasons for their participation in conflicts would be analysed. As for prevention efforts, the Office had made and would continue to make significant contributions to the report of the Secretary-General and would also devote increased attention to peacekeeping and peace-building efforts. She agreed that poverty was one of the reasons for the participation of children in armed conflict and underscored the need to reinforce the traditional values which in all cultures served to protect children from such conflict.

46. Replying to the question from the representative of Guinea, she said that various initiatives had been undertaken with regard to Sierra Leone, including the radio programme "Voice of Children", which was broadcast in collaboration with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and via which children were able to reach out to other children. Similar activities were also under way in other countries, such as Colombia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and would also be copied in various areas

with a view to creating what UNESCO called an international culture of peace.

47. The representative of Cuba had asked a question on the relationship between the Office of the Special Representative and the Security Council; the peace operations mandate should guarantee protection for children, and the Council was a legitimate forum for discussion of that issue.

48. Turning to the question asked by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Observer for Palestine, she said that any foreign occupation implied a situation of armed conflict which affected children and that her Office, as part of its research agenda, intended to deal with that issue through both research and promotion activities.

49. Replying to the question from the representative of the Sudan, she said that the Special Representative, during his country visits, endeavoured to promote cooperation with non-governmental organizations and civil society at the national level, as had been the case during his recent mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With regard to peace initiatives relating to insurgent groups, the objective was to monitor and protect the rights of children, as provided for under humanitarian law, and to secure a commitment in that regard from all parties.

50. Lastly, replying to the question from the representative of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the European Union, she said that the initial review of recent experience in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo with the child protection advisers would suggest that their mandate should be enhanced. As for the delay in submission of the report of the Special Representative, she apologized and explained that the delay had initially been deliberate, so that the report could incorporate the results of the special session of the General Assembly, which had, in the end, been postponed.

51. **Mr. Roberfroid** (Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF), replying to the question from the representative of Pakistan, said that UNICEF had no intention of ignoring the education of boy children but did consider the education of girl children to be a priority given their particularly disadvantaged situation. Nearly two thirds of all children not attending school were girls, although it was certainly also true that education for young girls would never improve if basic general education did not also improve. Replying to the question from the delegations of Belgium, speaking on behalf of the European Union, and Guinea, he said that the child protection advisers had cooperated closely with UNICEF and the Office of the Special Representative: their mandate had been prepared by consensus, and hiring and all other activities were undertaken jointly. An initial review was under way which would no doubt show that their mandate was very clear: the advisers reported on the situation of and specific problems faced by children and ensured that all peace programmes took their situation into account; UNICEF took responsibility for all activities which required increased human resources, such as dealing with existing problems, improving basic education and health systems and implementing demobilization and repatriation activities. Personnel in the field had indicated that they had received strong support from the advisers, and the review should help in fine-tuning some aspects of that very positive cooperation effort. Turning to the question from the representative of Australia, he said that it was essential to show that children could and should have a significant role to play. A number of youth delegates had already been planning to attend the special session when it had been postponed. The session was a novel initiative which had encountered some opposition, but it seemed to be off to a good start, and it was to be hoped that when it was finally held there would be a high level of youth participation. Such participation already existed at the national level, and various non-governmental organizations, especially in urban areas where there were street children, were working to help children help each other. Lastly, he agreed with the representative of Australia that more documentation must be made available in order to counter the prevailing scepticism about such experiments; the special session would provide a good opportunity to demonstrate that they were not mere exercises in rhetoric.

52. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Director of the New York Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), replying to the question posed by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union concerning the mainstreaming of the rights of the child in the work of the Office of the High Commissioner and the participation of young people in its programme, said that, like the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Office attached equal importance to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and promoted a human rights-based

approach to implement programmes designed to permit the enjoyment of the rights set forth in the Convention. The Durban Conference was one example of youth participation, and the Office of the High Commissioner had urged Governments to include young people in their delegations. The Office was also in favour of young people examining the reports of States parties to the Convention, submitting their comments to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and even participating in the Conference of States Parties. Furthermore, the Office tried to implement the Committee's recommendations and made them known to other mechanisms, such as special rapporteurs, who often invoked the Convention in support of their mandate. It also passed them on to United Nations teams working on the ground and used them to make needs assessments of countries which requested technical assistance. Lastly, it worked with non-governmental organizations in which children participated, and it came into direct contact with children wherever it had a presence on the ground, which was the case in 28 countries, as well as taking part in all activities designed to protect the rights of children, such as those being carried out in Sierra Leone.

53. **Ms. Stevens** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, and, in addition, Iceland, said that the preparatory process for the special session of the General Assembly on children had helped to build momentum at the global level for the defence of children. In accordance with the Convention, efforts must continue to be made to ensure that there was no relaxation of the attention given to children, particularly those living in difficult circumstances, to whom the international community had pledged to devote increased attention at the special session. The European Union would step up its efforts to ensure that, at the local, national and international levels, children and adolescents could exercise their right to express opinions and participate in the decision-making process in order to help build a better world. In that regard, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, proclaimed on 7 December 2000, contained elements relating to children, including their right to express opinions. The European Union reaffirmed its decision to participate constructively in the negotiations on the final document, in which effective strategies would have to be formulated for enhancing the effective promotion and protection of the rights of the child and which would have to comprise a strong declaration and an ambitious plan of action. In order not to prejudice the negotiations of the Preparatory Committee for the special session, the Group of Latin American and Caribbean countries and the European Union would be submitting a procedural draft resolution rather than the traditional general draft resolution on the agenda item under discussion.

54. The Convention on the Rights of the Child should guide the activities of the international community, since it remained the frame of reference and the fundamental legal basis for the exercise of the rights of the child. The European Union, together with most delegations, was making every effort to ensure that priority was given to children's rights in the final document of the special session on children. It was very important that the States parties to the Convention should apply its provisions effectively and that countries which had not already done so should ratify it. The European Union was deeply concerned at the number of reservations to the Convention and reiterated its appeal to States to review and withdraw their reservations, which were incompatible with the object and spirit of the Convention. The European Union also urged States to sign, ratify and apply the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In that regard, it welcomed the news from the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF that Romania had deposited its instruments of ratification of the Additional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which meant that the Additional Protocol could now enter into force. The European Union commended the work done by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and expressed support for the Committee in its efforts to promote and to protect children's rights. It was important that States which had not already done so should accept the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2, of the Convention, enlarging the membership of the Committee, so that it could enter into force.

55. The entry into force of the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, raising the minimum age for participation in hostilities to 18 years, would be an enormous step forward. The European Union called upon States to also sign and to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which characterized the enlistment of children

under the age of 15 or their use to participate actively in hostilities as a war crime. In the final document of the special session on children, the European Union hoped to see firm adherence to the principle of protection of child soldiers and of children in need of humanitarian assistance, particularly refugee, unaccompanied and internally displaced children.

56. The European Union welcomed the fact that the issue of children in armed conflict had been included in the work of the Security Council and sincerely hoped that the Council, during the debate scheduled to take place on that issue, would adopt an ambitious resolution, which would elicit a positive response to the requests made by the Secretary-General in his most recent report on the issue. The mainstreaming of child protection in peacekeeping operations such as MONUC and UNAMSIL was an example of the strengthening of measures to protect children affected by armed conflict. Peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building mandates should always include special provisions on the protection of children.

57. The European Union reiterated its thanks to Mr. Otunnu, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and to numerous non-governmental organizations and international organizations, such as UNICEF, for the commendable work which they were doing in the field. The European Union particularly appreciated the effectiveness and dedication of UNICEF and its decisive contribution to the promotion and protection of the rights of the child. It also paid tribute to Ms. Graça Machel, as a result of whose dedication increasing attention was being drawn to the tragic situation of children affected by armed conflict.

58. Children had the right to be protected from torture and all forms of violence, physical or mental abuse or brutality, abandonment, neglect, mistreatment and exploitation. The European Union believed that those issues should be tackled forcefully in the final document of the special session of the General Assembly on children. Greater awareness of the many aspects of violence against children would make it easier to formulate strategies to combat such violence. In that context, the European Union welcomed the fact that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had devoted a day in late September 2001 in Geneva, to discussing the theme of violence suffered by children in schools and within the family, and it hoped that the Committee's recommendations would be taken into account when the time came to formulate measures to eradicate that scourge. The discussion had been the second phase of the general debate on the issue of violence against children, which had begun in 2000. The European Union supported the Committee's request for the creation of a working group to conduct an in-depth study on the issue of violence against children.

59. Children continued to be victims of various forms of sexual exploitation, such as prostitution, pornography, the sale of children, paedophilia and sexual abuse within the family. In that area too, greater awareness and in-depth analysis of the problem should lead to ongoing, increased action which transcended national borders, since the crime of sexual exploitation of children knew no borders: its perpetrators were becoming increasingly professional and were taking advantage of the opportunities offered by globalization (increasingly complex cross-border organizations, the possibilities offered by the Internet, prostitution networks, sex tourism, etc.). The member States of the European Union had adopted various national and international measures to combat the sexual exploitation of children, such as the STOP and Daphne programmes, and would continue to strengthen their action at all levels. All the European Union member countries had signed the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

60. The European Union welcomed the work carried out by Ms. Calcetas-Santos, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and also the opportunity that the international community would have at the upcoming World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama to review the measures adopted since the 1996 Congress in Stockholm.

61. Child labour was another serious form of exploitation of children. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) figures, 250 million children aged between 5 and 14 years were working to earn a living. Many more were engaged in "invisible" work or were being exploited in conditions of near slavery. The European Union believed that the eradication of all forms of exploitation of children should be a priority for all States. It therefore called on all States that had not yet done so to ratify ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and on States parties to that Convention to

begin fulfilling their commitments thereunder immediately.

62. With regard to HIV/AIDS, the European Union would do everything possible to fulfil the commitments made at the special session of the General Assembly on that issue, particularly with regard to children. The same applied to health policy in general. The European Union would insist tirelessly that the rights of boys and girls to receive reproductive health care and services, rights recognized in the basic documents of all the major United Nations conferences, must not be called into question in the outcome document of the special session.

63. The European Union wished to raise an issue of particular concern to it, namely, the application of the death penalty to minors, which certain countries still maintained in their legislation; it urged those countries to abolish it. It was essential to take measures to comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the principles set out by the United Nations in that area. The European Union was also deeply concerned at the use of torture against children and called upon States which had not already done so to ratify and abide by the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

64. The European Union believed that a world fit for children could be built only if the international community was prepared to invest in them. Children's exercise of their economic, social and cultural rights was vitally important for their development. It had been demonstrated that investing in primary education, especially for girls, was the most productive decision that a society could take. It was essential to reduce the marginalization of disadvantaged children who suffered the anguish of poverty and unequal opportunities. That meant investing in the right to education, which was an essential element in combating exclusion. The European Union attached great importance to the conclusions of the World Education Forum held in Dakar in April 2000. In keeping with the Framework for Action adopted at the Forum, it believed that education was a fundamental right and the key to sustainable development and peace within and between countries, and it recalled the importance of incorporating into children's education the teaching of human rights, tolerance, citizenship and the exercise of democracy.

65. No child should suffer discrimination. Non-discrimination was one of the cornerstones of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, it had been recognized that many of the victims of racism and other forms of intolerance were children, particularly girls. It was necessary, therefore, to give priority to assisting children who were victims of discrimination.

66. Deploring the persistent discrimination against women and the girl child, the European Union believed that gender mainstreaming should be applied to all policies concerning young people. In dealing with issues such as violence, exploitation, reproductive and sexual rights and female genital mutilation, particular attention should be paid to the girl child.

67. The European Union reaffirmed the importance of ensuring that disabled children were fully integrated into society. Many children with disabilities did not enjoy equal rights to participate in the same activities as other children, even in family life. It was important to guarantee access to education, vocational training and social services for disabled children and to ensure respect for all their rights.

68. In conclusion, the European Union gave its commitment to combat all forms of discrimination against children, with a view to ensuring that all boys and girls enjoyed the right to participate on an equal footing in the building of a world fit for children.

69. **Mr. Martin Andjaba** (Namibia), speaking on behalf of the 14 member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), said that, owing to the postponement of the special session on children, the debate on children and armed conflict was taking place before the adoption of the document entitled "A World Fit for Children", which would have made a tremendous contribution to the discussion.

70. In the decade since the Convention on the Rights of the Child had entered into force, the plight of the world's children had barely improved. The SADC region was among those worst affected by armed conflict. The direct and indirect impact of war had taken a heavy toll on children in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola. The SADC members noted with appreciation that UNICEF and other United Nations funds, programmes and offices were assisting children affected by conflicts in those two countries. In that connection, they welcomed the

inclusion of child protection in the mandate of MONUC and the deployment of senior child protection advisers. They were pleased to note that the "Action for the Rights of the Child" (ARC) project, developed jointly by the International Save the Children Alliance, UNHCHR, UNICEF and UNHCR, would provide training not only for the staff of UNHCR but also for governmental and non-governmental partners.

71. The SADC members welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the prompt ratification of ILO Convention No. 182. Many SADC countries were currently taking the necessary steps to sign or ratify the two Protocols. More specifically, on 25 April 2001 Namibia had ratified both Protocols, and it would soon deposit the instruments of ratification. In that regard, SADC urged Member States to integrate into their national legislation the principle of a minimum age of military recruitment of 18 years.

72. The SADC countries attached great importance to continued interaction and collaboration between the various United Nations agencies and to a wide range of programmes such as Action for the Rights of the Child, the International Save the Children Alliance and "Say Yes for Children". That was a welcome development which, if fully taken advantage of, would facilitate the realization of the dream of "A World Fit for Children".

73. The HIV/AIDS pandemic had become a major threat to the progress made in the SADC region. As a result of HIV/AIDS-related deaths, many children had been orphaned and, consequently, left more vulnerable to poverty and to all kinds of child abuse. SADC fully supported the Declaration of Commitment adopted at the special session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001 and particularly welcomed the inclusion of a section dealing with children affected by HIV/AIDS. The SADC countries therefore called on their international partners for enhanced cooperation and assistance in order to achieve the necessary social development to be able to implement their commitments. They also encouraged developed countries to honour their commitment to allocate 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to development aid and to increase official development assistance to developing countries, in order to enable the countries of the region to implement programmes aimed at social development.

74. SADC attached great importance to education. Most of its member States had acceded to international conventions on educational development and undertaken policy reform measures with the emphasis on universal education. A significant number of SADC countries had already achieved net enrolment rates of 90 per cent in primary education. In that regard, SADC welcomed the African Girls' Education Initiative, adopted as a result of the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000. It noted that the Committee on the Rights of the Child had decided at its twenty-third session to devote one day of its general discussion in September 2000 to the issue of violence against children and one day in September 2001 to the problems of violence suffered by children in schools and within the family.

75. The report of the Secretary-General on social development revealed that 113 million children in the world were not enrolled in school, and that 60 per cent of them were girls. Those figures presented an unacceptable reality and a grievous waste of human development potential, and SADC welcomed the commitment given by the Secretary-General in Dakar to make girls' education a priority.

76. All member States of SADC were parties to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child and were fully committed to the Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the Pan-African Forum on the Future of Children, held in Cairo, Egypt, from 23 to 31 May 2001. Furthermore, they welcomed the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, due to be held in Yokohama in December 2001, which they hoped would result in new commitments for the promotion and protection of the rights of the child.

77. Finally, SADC was concerned because issues specific to the girl child were barely mentioned in United Nations documents, even though the lives of girls continued to be beset by difficulties.

78. **Mr. Valdés** (Chile), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that he regretted that even in the context of the negotiations on the document "A World Fit for Children" there were still obstacles and arguments which questioned the principal achievements, objectives and principles enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights instruments and recognized by United Nations conferences and summits. He was concerned that terms

and language accepted by consensus in innumerable documents relating to social issues had been subjected to distortions and unilateral interpretations. It was to be hoped that the Plan of Action for the next 10 years to be adopted at the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly would consolidate within a coherent programme the various concepts, commitments and objectives defined by the international community in the series of summits and conferences which had occurred since the World Summit for Children, at which the need for specific policies for adolescents, along with other issues, had been recognized.

79. Lives must be saved and everything possible must be done so that those lives could be lived with dignity and bright prospects. Health care must therefore be a priority in government programmes, including the right to receive any necessary and appropriate services in the area of sexual and reproductive health, which, in addition to the right to health care, implied the right to receive education, information and services in areas relating to reproduction. It was also important that States which had signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child should ensure that the principles and rights contained therein became a reality. The right to receive necessary and appropriate services in the areas of health and education was an objective which could not be postponed, and free and compulsory primary education, without discrimination of any kind, in particular on the basis of race or gender, must also become a reality.

80. Bearing in mind the original consultation processes held in Kingston and in Panama City, the Rio Group called on the international community to design, implement and strengthen specific plans and programmes at the national and international levels with a view to gradually eliminating child labour.

81. The expansion of international trade was of vital importance for the prosperity of the countries in the region and the Rio Group countries reiterated their individual and collective commitment to strengthening a multilateral, open, non-discriminatory, safe and predictable free trade system. Regional integration and increased trade between the various regions in the world, on the basis of equality, must also be promoted. That would help to promote greater investment in children and adolescents, eliminate discrimination and reduce inequality and marginalization. The guarantee of a favourable economic environment would contribute to efforts aimed at dealing with the sad reality of street children and increasing suppo boys, girls and adolescents who were membe minority groups as well as for the most vuln groups, in particular indigenous peoples.

82. **Mr. Paolillo** (Uruguay), speaking on behalf Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) associated countries, welcomed the statement ma behalf of the Rio Group. Protection and promot the rights of the child had been a basic princi social commitment in the expanded MERC group, which since the Buenos Aires Charte undertaken to ensure effective implementation guiding principles on comprehensive protectio children and adolescents and promote the develo of specific policies in that area, taking into accou family and community context while giving priority to preventive and corrective measures.

83. It had also been decided to establish MERCOSUR support mechanisms for the disadvantaged social groups, prioritizing aspects as nutrition, with special attention to children, women heads of household and under age m among others. Concrete measures had been pro to meet the special needs of boys, girls and adole who were victims of violence and sexual abuse deal with issues involving child labour, pregnancy, drug abuse and involvement in crime.

84. The countries of the expanded MERC group and associated countries had com themselves to guaranteeing the right to basic edu and to promoting access to secondary, technica vocational education, which were decisive facto overcoming poverty and ideal vehicles for soci economic mobility. At the first formal meeting Ministers of Social Development of MERC Bolivia and Chile, held in Asunción in March 20 had also been decided to prioritize actions aim eliminating child labour, in particular its worst and to develop joint strategies within the framew a doctrine of comprehensive protection. The n family had been deemed of fundamental importa the unit on which to focus social policies aim among others, encouraging boys and girls to primary school and adolescents to co intermediate-level education.

85. The countries of the expanded MERC group were committed to improving the qual education through teacher training, promotion o

values in the curriculum and the use of information technologies. An effort was also being made to integrate the many indigenous children living in most of the MERCOSUR countries, Bolivia and Chile into that process. One method of promoting respect for their cultures was to provide them with bilingual education, which was an enormous challenge given the tremendous financial and human resources required.

86. The health care and health services sector was an issue of major importance for the countries of the expanded MERCOSUR group. Progress had been made, but it remained an ongoing challenge owing to difficulties encountered in economic and social development.

87. The grave problem of children living or working in the streets remained to be resolved, in spite of intensive efforts to eliminate that problem on the part of the authorities, civil society and non-governmental organizations.

88. The basic guidelines and frame of reference for all action on behalf of children and adolescents in the MERCOSUR and associated countries were provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Those countries were also guided by the principles embodied in regional and international documents which showed countries where they should be headed in their efforts to protect children and adolescents; those included the optional protocols to the Convention, which most of the countries in the group had already signed. The MERCOSUR and associated countries noted with satisfaction that the protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography would be entering into force in January 2002.

89. The MERCOSUR and associated countries were pleased at the work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and urged countries to approve the amendment to article 43, paragraph 2 of the Convention, which would increase from 10 to 18 the number of experts on the Committee so as to ensure that it had the membership needed to carry out its important work.

90. It was unfortunate that in the preparatory process for the special session of the General Assembly on children, questions had been raised with regard to certain well-established concepts that had long been accepted in the Organization. It was a disservice to children to hold them hostage to political games and circumstances.

91. Much remained to be done on behalf of children and adolescents, both in the MERCOSUR region and throughout the world. It was therefore essential to work in a focused manner so as to ensure that the further commitments undertaken during the forthcoming special session would lead to genuine progress on the matter.

92. **Ms. Yang Yi** (China) said that 2001 marked the tenth anniversary of the Chinese Government's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Over those 10 years, the Chinese Government had actively fulfilled its commitments, further improved the situation with regard to the survival and development of children, safeguarded children's legitimate rights and interests and made unremitting efforts to promote child development.

93. Her Government had submitted its first report on its implementation of the Convention, and the report had been considered. The Committee had expressed its approval of China's conscientious implementation of the Convention. To further demonstrate its emphasis on the protection of the rights of the child, her Government had signed the two optional protocols to the Convention and was pressing ahead for their ratification. In the meantime, it was now preparing its second report on implementation of the Convention.

94. China had developed a fairly comprehensive legal system to ensure the survival and development of children. The system was centred on the Constitution and the Protection of Minors Act and included civil, criminal and administrative laws and regulations, such as the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency Act, the Education Act, the Maternal and Child Health Care Act, the Adoption Act, the Marriage Act and the Labour Act, thereby providing effective legal guarantees for the protection of children's rights and interests.

95. In 1992, in line with the general targets of the national plan for economic and social development and in the light of the 24 global goals of child development, her Government, taking into account the current situation in respect of child survival and development in China, had formulated the National Programme of Action for Child Development in the 1990s. The Programme contained 49 targets, including lowering the infant mortality rate, lowering the under-five mortality rate, lowering the infant malnutrition rate, maintaining the rate of coverage of planned

immunization, universalizing basic education, protecting children in hardship and protecting children from HIV/AIDS. By the end of 2000, China had basically attained the global goals set out in its Programme of Action for Children and by the World Summit for Children. All those actions fully demonstrated that China had made tremendous achievements in protecting children's rights. On 22 May 2001, her Government had promulgated the new National Programme of Action for Children (2001-2010), setting even higher standards and requirements for the protection of children's rights and thus providing effective safeguards for the healthy growth of the child.

96. In the view of her delegation, protecting children's rights was a common cause of the entire international community. Her delegation was gratified to see the beneficial work done by the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as efforts made by the Secretary-General and the two special rapporteurs on the question of the child.

97. Many cases of violations of children's rights still occurred around the world. To enable every child in the world to enjoy the rights provided in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it was still necessary for the international community and Governments of all countries to take effective measures to eliminate the sources of the problems of children and to provide an environment conducive to their growth. Her delegation hoped that the special session of the General Assembly on children would be a success. It believed that the concerted efforts of the international community to protect children would result in further progress which would benefit children throughout the world.

98. **Mr. Kolby** (Norway) said that recently there had been shift in focus on children from a welfare and assistance perspective to concentration on the rights of the child and related obligations and responsibilities of States to protect children, a development which Norway strongly supported. It was the responsibility of every State to provide conditions for children in which they might prosper in peace and in which human rights were respected.

99. Girls were especially vulnerable in many situations. His delegation was gravely concerned by evidence of large-scale trafficking in young girls and stressed the need for consolidated action to protect children from that abhorrent practice which had become an industry of enormous proportions and which violated the most fundamental rights of children. In that context, he was pleased to announce that Norway had recently ratified the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and urged other States to do so as soon as possible.

100. His delegation agreed with the Secretary-General that it was now time to start an "era of application" of standards. Although States Parties themselves had primary responsibility for the implementation of the protocol, it was also a sphere in which international cooperation was crucial. The Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, which was to be held in Japan later in 2001, would present an ideal opportunity to strengthen cooperation and improve coordination of efforts in that regard.

101. The particular vulnerability of children placed them at risk during times of public unrest, social instability and particularly at times of armed conflict. Norway strongly supported Security Council initiatives to address the issue of children in armed conflict and efforts to adopt a resolution on that subject, since it believed that the rights and needs of children should occupy a privileged place in all relevant matters handled by the Security Council. In that connection, the recommendations of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict should be given full consideration.

102. The 1998 adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court was an important step towards assigning responsibility for certain crimes that also affected children; the international community now had an opportunity to make offenders accountable for universally recognized crimes against humanity, including the conscription and enlistment of children under 15 years of age into the armed forces, the use of children to participate in hostilities and the targeting of children as a strategy of conflict. All States must put an end to impunity for those disgraceful practices.

103. Displacement was another extreme risk for children. Displaced children lost the security of their community and in many cases their family, and often were regarded with resentment and suspicion when they arrived in new communities. Since many of those children suffered traumatic violations of human rights and humanitarian law, they might need special protection in the country where they sought refuge.

Civil society played an important role in the peace-building process, which was crucial for strengthening local processes and preventing future violence. The participation of children in those processes was a critical element in the achievement of a lasting peace and a humane, productive society. It was important to give children a voice and to listen to them.

104. It was unfortunate that the special session of the General Assembly on children had had to be postponed; however he stressed the need to keep issues relating to children at the very top of the United Nations agenda. In the process leading up to the special session, Norway would continue to participate actively and constructively in negotiations on the final document, and would do its utmost to ensure that the special session produced a strong document and firm plan of action that would make a real difference for children.

105. **Ms. Khuan** (Russian Federation) said that the attacks of 11 September 2001 had not lessened the determination of the community of nations to promote children's rights, security and well-being. As had been mentioned by President Vladimir Putin, terrorism knew no moral boundaries and terrorist brutality constituted a grave menace for the children of the world, who must be protected from it. Regional cooperation in matters relating to childhood had made a considerable contribution to the preparations for the special session, as had been shown in 2001 when various regional conferences had been held in Minsk, Berlin and Stockholm. Those conferences had examined the issue of safeguarding the rights of the child and had produced recommendations for national strategies to improve the lives of new generations. Those recommendations should be published as an annex to the document of the special session entitled "A world fit for children".

106. Safeguarding the interests of children was a priority area for the authorities in the Russian Federation. In 1998, a federal law had been promulgated regarding basic guarantees of children's rights in the country. That law established basic criteria for the promotion and protection of children's rights and for improving their living conditions. In 2000, ten special programmes for children had been renewed and extended until 2002; four of them were under the direct control of the President himself. In 2001, the Government had approved a plan to improve children's living conditions during the period 2002-2004 and had completed the elaboration of the basic criteria of its social policy relating to children, which would be in force until 2010. In 2000, his Government had signed the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. In 2001, it had signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which would serve to give more effective protection to the rights of the girl child. Preparations had also begun for ratification of those international instruments and of ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour.

107. Despite the establishment in the Russian Federation over the past 10 years of a new system of legal protection for the interests of children which was adapted to the new socio-economic situation, there were still problems requiring urgent solutions. In that context, UNICEF Executive Director Ms. Carol Bellamy had made a working tour of the Russian Federation from 6 to 10 October 2001, during which she had reaffirmed her commitment to continue increasing cooperation in the areas of social protection, health care and the promotion of the rights of the child. Ms. Bellamy had also had an opportunity to familiarize herself with three experimental projects in St. Petersburg: the social and rehabilitation centre "House of Labour", for girls affected by violence, the young people's clinic "Juventa" and the programme dedicated to those infected with HIV and those suffering from AIDS. All those activities were part of a broader UNICEF programme entitled "Health and Development of Youth". With help from UNICEF, authorities had been established in eight regions in the country with responsibility for defending the rights of the child. The Russian Federation attached great importance to interaction with UNICEF and would in future give considerable support to its commendable work. A new cooperation programme for the period 2003-2005 was currently being prepared, taking into account priority issues at the national level. Lastly, she commended the courage of the UNICEF staff members currently carrying out their vital humanitarian mission for the children of Afghanistan.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.